



## The Middle East Partnership Initiative

### Expanding Entrepreneurship

*"Around the world we're embracing a broader engagement ...by listening and working together; by seeking more partnerships between businesses and entrepreneurs to advance prosperity and opportunity for people everywhere."*

*President Obama - September 22, 2009*

The **Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI)**, located within the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs at the U.S. Department of State, is a unique program that implements President Obama's vision to directly engage with and invest in the people of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). MEPI works with local and international non-governmental organizations, the private sector, academic institutions, and governments to create vibrant partnerships between the citizens of the U.S. and MENA to foster the development of pluralistic, participatory, and prosperous societies throughout the region.

Entrepreneurship is a key vehicle to improve economic conditions and expand job creation and social change in the MENA region. MEPI is committed to fostering economic and social entrepreneurship to unlock innate potential, spur economic and private sector development, create employment opportunities, and improve society. This is especially critical in light of the region's shifting demographics and "youth bulge," which is introducing millions of youth throughout the MENA region into the labor market.

#### Examples of MEPI Entrepreneurship Projects

**Middle East Entrepreneurship Training** - The MEPI-funded Middle East Entrepreneurship Training (MEET) project, implemented by the University of California-San Diego's Rady School of Management, identifies, develops, and sustains a new corps of business and civil society leaders in the MENA region. The project is comprised of two components – multi-week training programs for CEOs, executives and civil society leaders, and a grants program for regional coalitions of business and social entrepreneurs. The project applies the skills and efficiency of entrepreneurship to civil society or business groups.



**Small Business Initiative for Women** - MEPI has entered into a formal relationship with the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) to provide assistance to entrepreneurs and governments in Oman, Bahrain, Tunisia and Qatar looking to strengthen their small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) sectors. This first-of-its-kind effort addresses the needs of female entrepreneurs in the Middle East and North Africa. Specifically, the initiative provides technical assistance to governments operating SME support and loan programs; boosts women's participation in local, regional and international trade; and creates access to business associations. The Initiative is supported by Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) signed between the SBA and the governments of the participating countries.

**U.S. - Saudi Women's Forum on Social Entrepreneurship** The U.S.-Saudi Women's Forum on Social Entrepreneurship aims to enrich the lives of women and their communities by supporting the application of business and leadership skills to social needs. Dar Al Hekma (DAH), a private women's college in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, has partnered with Babson College and Wellesley Centers for Women (WCW) in the United States to teach business and leadership skills to Saudi women to enable them to implement successful social enterprises. The project provides skills-building training, mentoring, and project support to dozens of young Saudi women who are currently launching social enterprises in their communities in Saudi Arabia. These enterprises deal with issues such as diabetes, disability rights, volunteerism, and recycling.

**Support for Young Entrepreneurs** - MEPI is in the final stages of a competition to fund projects that encourage entrepreneurship by youth in the MENA region. Organizations from the private sector, civil society, and academic communities have applied for up to \$2.25 million to foster a culture of entrepreneurship in youth. Examples of activities that may be funded under this project include entrepreneurial skills-building, idea generation, business incubation, competition, access to capital, and the development of networks to connect entrepreneurs.



